

**Neighborhood Conservation District Commission
Minutes of the July 31, 2013 Meeting
Brookline Town Hall, 333 Washington Street, Room 103**

Commissioners Present

Mark Allen
James Batchelor
Stephen Chiumenti
Dennis DeWitt

Deborah Goldberg
Richard Garver
David King
Robin Koocher

Absent
Paul Bell
Eleanor Demont
Joyce Stavis-Zak

Staff: Kara Brewton, Maria Morelli

Members of the Public: Alan Allaire, Saralynn Allaire, Alex Beck, Ken Berman, Evelyn Berman, Herb Brody, Phyllis Brody, Joni Burstein, Deborah Dong, Jane Eisenky, Barbara Faverman, Jerry Feuer, Nancy Fulton, Scott Gladstone, Richard Gray, Judi Leichtner, SL Mayer, James Solverson (residents)

Owen Murphy, Chestnut Hill Realty consultant and videographer

Commissioner David King began the meeting at 6:55 pm.

Discussion and Approval of the July 15, 2013 Minutes

Robin Koocher recommended deleting the first paragraph under “Additional Considerations.”

Voted Deborah Goldberg made the motion to approve the minutes of July 15, 2013, with the recommended revision; James Batchelor seconded.

General Scope of the Proposal

Interim Regulatory Planner Maria Morelli gave an overview of the Hancock Village c.40B Proposal submitted in June 2013.

Developer Chestnut Hill Realty (CHR) submitted a proposal in August 2012. Town of Brookline submitted a very effective response to Mass Development. From documentation the Town obtained from Mass Development, it was clear that the subsidizing agency did not consider the Hancock Village site appropriate for the project, echoing several concerns the Town had with the proposal. [The Town and Mass Development expressed concerns with the elimination of the greenspace buffer, lack of well-conceived vehicular circulation, an out-of-scale apartment building, among others.]

CHR withdrew its 2012 Proposal to Mass Development and submitted a revised proposal in June 2013.

The Town asked for and received an extension from Mass Development to submit its response to the 2013 Proposal. The Town’s response is due August 30, 2013, instead of August 12.

Brief Overview of Changes to 2013 Proposal

	2013 Proposal	2012 Proposal
Architectural style	More traditional; peaked roofs	Modern style; flat roof on apartment bldg.
Number of units Town houses Apartment Bldg	192 76 116	271 126 145
Number of bedrooms	One: 64 Two: 70 Three: 28 Four: 28 Five: 2?	
Parking spaces per dwelling unit	1.74	1.67
Parking facilities	Above-ground garages added to buffer zone in addition to parking fields and below-ground parking	Parking fields and garage below apartment building
Number of stories, height	2.5 story housing (38.5') 4 story apartment bldg. 54' to 57' to 74' Height changes depending on grade; yet roof line remains the same. Apartment building garage will be below ground; a portion of which is visible above grade.	3 story housing 5 story apartment bldg. Claimed: 43' (3-story housing) 35-70' apartment bldg
Impervious surfaces, %	Appears to be the same as previous proposal	
Footprint	Verify any changes	
FAR	0.47 to 1.10 to 1.36	
Treatment of greenspace buffer zone	2013 plans still call for development in buffer zone. In fact, seven structured garages are newly added to buffer.	

Subcommittee's Report on Site Eligibility

Purpose of the Subcommittee

The NCD Subcommittee appointed a subcommittee to review the 2013 proposal and assess the site's eligibility for the project. The Subcommittee would then recommend comments to be included in the Town's response to Mass Development.

Framework for the Subcommittee's Analysis

The Subcommittee met on July 23, 2013, to review the proposal. The framework of the discussion was c.40B's implementing regulations, 760 CMR 56.04(4)c, which pertains to site eligibility and the factors that define conformance to the regulations. The Subcommittee also consulted the State's *Handbook: Chapter 40B Design Review Guidelines*, to provide relevant examples that would support its positions. After reviewing the proposal comprehensively, members further identified when the developer did not respond to concerns the Town has with the 2012 proposal. The Subcommittee also indicated how the proposal deviated from the NCD guidelines.

The letter drafted by Mass Development to indicate its opinion of the site's eligibility was also a reference for the Subcommittee.

Analysis and Critique

The Subcommittee finds that the site is not appropriate for the proposed project.

To summarize the review of the proposal discussion, Subcommittee Chair David King and Planner Maria Morelli prepared a draft written report for the Commission to comment on. David King presented an overview of the Subcommittee's findings at the Commission's July 31, 2013, meeting. Highlights of these findings are listed below. [Refer to the draft written report dated July 31, 2013, for analysis.]

1. Conceptual Site Plan

- Completely eliminated greenbelt buffer, a design element that defines and softens edge of site. Handbook (and Mass Development) regard this buffer element critical to well-integrated projects.
- Greenbelt is more than a visual buffer; it is actively used. Even CHR refers to greenbelt as a park and regularly schedules activities there.
- Maximum build-out without regard for existing development plan. Existing site consists of superblocks with front- and rear-yard greenspace to separate pedestrians from vehicles.
- Abutters on Beverly and Russett Roads will face a shoehorned arrangement of 2.5-story housing and a row of garages. Hancock Village resident will face an unrelenting apartment building wall (74 high at one point by 530 feet long at South elevation).
- Vehicular circulation creates traffic safety concerns. Asheville Road is the primary direct access to the East parcel, the most congested area of the site. Fire and DPW will comment further.
- Developer considers site an excellent model of smart growth through creative infill and utilization of existing public transit. Yet, the infill buildings do not integrate well with the existing development pattern. The site is also not transit-oriented.

2. Building Massing

- Horizontal massing of apartment building is not mitigated with buffering or effective design techniques (despite hipped-roof style and garage levels below ground). Roof line does not vary in height to follow existing contours of the topography.
- Apartment building is out-of-scale to surrounding site: 51 to 74 feet high and 530 feet long at South elevation.
- Apartment building is too close to existing structures only two-stories high. Planning Department to draw site sections that illustrate worst-case perspectives. Developer site sections, though very likely correctly drawn, are not the most representative.
- Paved areas around proposed 2.5-story structures are closer to rear property lines, despite Town's concerns with inadequate setbacks.
- More structured parking was added to the buffer zone.

3. Topography and Environmental Resources

- Proposal does not use existing topography to mitigate massing of structures and bulk of apartment building.
- Contours are flattened (see grading plan).
- Puddingstone outcroppings are eliminated.
- Elimination of greenspace buffer is a major strike against proposal.

4. Existing Development Patterns

- Original Hancock Village site is a hallmark of effective urban planning:
 - Planned to meet social and economic needs (postwar housing for veterans)
 - Designed to be pedestrian-focused (separates pedestrians from vehicular traffic)
 - Worked with existing topography to buffer site and retain natural contours

5. National Register Eligible

- Massachusetts Historical Commission considers HV community eligible for National Register status. Boston Landmarks Commission has nominated portion of HV in Boston for National Register designation. HV very likely meets more than required criteria.

6. Neighborhood Conservation District Bylaw

- Significance of the history and character of Hancock Village prompted the Town Meeting to pass two bylaws establishing NCDs in Brookline and specifically the HV NCD.
- HV NCD provisions seek to uphold sound planning principles of the original HV design:
 - Maintain pedestrian-centric pathways
 - Maintain contours of the site
 - Conserve the greenbelt buffer
 - Limit the addition of impervious surfaces
 - Limit removal of rock outcroppings

7. Negative Impacts

- Effective buffer eliminated.
- Contours flattened; awkward transitions between proposed structures and existing ones.
- Driveways and parking are closer to housing; not pedestrian-focused as in original design.
- Out-of-scale, overwhelming bulk of apartment building not mitigated; too close to existing structures.
- No step-downs (variations) in apartment building height.
- Shoehorned row of housing, with more structured parking, creates a wall of construction at the edge of the site, where a buffer should be.

Comments on the Subcommittee's Report

In General

Under the sections in the Report that correspond to c.40B regulations, quote directly from the Mass Development letter and then proceed with Subcommittee's analysis.

The following information should be added to or emphasized in the Report:

Conceptual Site Plan / Existing Development Patterns

1. **Atypical Site** –Note that Hancock Village is not a typical site but a long established and laid-out community. Contrast the HV site plan with the initial site conditions for the St.Aidan's project in Brookline. The site for the St. Aidan's project was appropriate for a successful c.40B development, and subsequently, was strongly supported by the Town and the community.

The Handbook cites the importance of integrating a project into the surrounding community, or existing development patterns. The surrounding community consists not only of the abutters of Beverly and Russett Roads but also the existing Hancock Village neighborhood.

2. **Parti** – Emphasize the application of the Garden City model in Hancock Village. Refer to the *parti*, the basic scheme and underlying idea of the existing site: Housing arranged with open courtyards in the front, and private yards in the rear to separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic. The proposed design undermines the existing site plan.
3. **Vehicular Circulation** – In addition to comments from Fire and DPW, Planning Department will provide data and visuals that support the claim that vehicular circulation is not well planned.

Topography

1. **Ledge** – Emphasize complete elimination of puddingstone.
2. **Drainage** – The extensive flattening of the contours means the elimination of mature tree growth, and consequently, environmental concerns such as drainage problems.

Neighborhood Conservation District

1. Emphasize the historical basis for the Neighborhood Conservation District.

James Batchelor referred the Commission to historically significant organizations and specific documents that the Commission can use to make this case.

2. Robin Koocher recommended listing the specific provisions of the Hancock Village NCD Bylaws along with how the proposal deviates from those provisions.
3. Emphasize that the NCD supports the sound urban planning principles implemented in the original design.
4. Identify the ways that NCD provisions are more expansive than those covered by Local Historic Districts.

Corrections to Report

Under “National Register Eligible” – add Town of Brookline:

“The development of Hancock Village is regarded as historically significant to the Town of Brookline, the City of Boston, and the Massachusetts Historical Commission.”

Under Neighborhood Conservation District Guidelines – insert the following revised sentence:

“The significance of the history and character of the Hancock Village community prompted the Town Meeting to pass two Bylaws establishing Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCD) in Brookline and in particular the Hancock Village NCD.”

Additional Considerations for Town’s Response

1. Show the impact the apartment building will have on VFW Parkway, which has National Register designation. In section of apartment building, extend section to VFW
2. Vehicular Circulation: Provide visual and quantitative data.

Provide:

- Widths of access ways and feeder roads
- Number of parking spaces and homes, current and proposed
- Average daily trips

Revisit the private driveway, Asheville Road, the direct access to the West parcel, and the fact that it never received proper permits.

Questions

Some questions about the proposed project that will require follow-up or ongoing analysis:

How many bedrooms are proposed compared with the earlier submission?

What is the assessment of the storm drainage design, particularly the impact on abutters?

Because most of the existing trees will be removed, how does the drainage design compensate for ensuing water runoff?

How will traffic issues be assessed, especially on roads less than 40 feet wide; namely, Russett Road and the Asheville roadway?

Next NCD Commission Meeting

Objective: To edit the Subcommittee's Report on the Hancock Village c.40B Proposal

NCD Commissioner Richard Garver will lead the meeting.

Date: Tuesday, August 6 at 7 pm. [Location: Town Hall, Room 408]

There being no new business, David King adjourned the meeting at 8:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Maria Morelli
Interim Regulatory Planner

August 5, 2013

Approved August 6, 2013